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World of Warcraft Intern Design Test

1. Explain a little about what you believe to be the most influential positive change we ever made to World of Warcraft?

I believe the Death Knight hero class completely changed the paradigm of both class design and of starting quest design in World of Warcraft. Many design principles that now define the new player experience stem from the Death Knight class starting area: since Cataclysm, starting areas feature more cohesive and cinematic questlines. Matching and thematic armor sets were introduced for low-level zones, helping players look epic and feel accomplished.

More obviously, the Death Knight class paved the way for the Demon Hunter hero class, and I believe that principles such as starting at a higher level and having unique and powerful abilities have influenced the creation of the upcoming Allied Races. Death Knights changed what it means to make and level a character in World of Warcraft and their starting quests have shown their DNA in questing ever since.

2. Like-wise what was the change you felt has had the strongest negative impact, and why?

While I think there are many positive elements of the modern Dungeon Finder (rewards for random dungeons incentivise me not to run Blackfathom Deeps over and over until I get a katana), I think it drastically changed the leveling experience in a negative way.

The ability to more easily *find* players to run dungeons, and to immediately understand their roles is a fantastic change. The major issue stems from the fact that there is no required communication between members of the group. Without an “icebreaker” (IE: reaching out and asking someone to join one’s group) and with the dungeon finder incentivising rapid queuing and running, the social element of low-level dungeon runs becomes absent.

Many of my fastest friends were made in search of groups for dungeons at low-levels, and the removal of a required social element makes the player experience more insular and less cooperative.

3. Please describe the most memorable game-play experience you have had in World of Warcraft, and what design elements do you think contributed to it.

When I first started playing at a young age, I reached level 50 with my human warrior Hackspell. Being a little bored with questing, I decided to wander around a capital city and noticed two low-level characters engaging in quasi-roleplay: one a dwarven priest, the other a night elf hunter. I approached them and told them in my best dramatic typing that I could show them places of power beyond their imagining. The dwarf said “sure” and I ended up in the shoes of an impromptu Azerothian tour guide. In short, it was *awesome*. I took them to Azuremyst Isle, I took them to the Burning Steppes. I took them to places I had never been before. It made me feel epic and important, it made them feel wanted, and generally was a deeply impactful WoW experience. We later formed a short-lived guild together.

I think the key element that facilitated this experience is the concept of character levels. Levels being an analogue for character experience — and, frankly in some sense, character age — set the stage for a context of interaction that led to *me* being an experienced tour guide and *them* being less experienced heroes in need of teaching.

Beyond that, WoW’s deeply immersive and atmospheric spaces allowed for there to be a discussion of the world. Azuremyst’s massive, glowing crystals are an immediate hook into the story of the world around you. WoW’s spaces lead to a curiosity in players that encourages them to explore the world around them.

4. We want you to create an item reward for a legendary quest line in World of Warcraft. This questline involves the upcoming battle for Azeroth. The item you must design would be rewarded at the end of a lengthy questline that sees the player fighting for their faction against the other side. It will culminate in an epic battle in the opposing faction’s capital city. This item would be the final reward at the end.

As a long-time Alliance player, I immediately jump to the battle for the Undercity, and I can think of nothing so saturated in the lore as King Terenas Menethil’s crown. The item is deeply tied to lore for players who are familiar, and otherwise is

just inherently cool. A crown is a crown, and crowns are awesome. In addition, WoW already has crowns appear as an item in every armor tier (cloth, plate, etc.) and wouldn't be out of place from the established armor paradigm.

The crown's passive ability would summon Terenas Menethil's spirit (freed from Frostmourne) to revive the player temporarily after death in a non-instanced area, preventing players from having an overpowered ability in dungeons/raids and PvP, but allowing them to feel epic if they die in the world as a whole.

In addition, the crown would have a hidden passive that would allow the player to see spirits in the Lordaeron throne room, fragments of their souls that linger there after Arthas's betrayal.

In addition, it would allow the player to interact with both the spirits of Terenas, Uther, and Arthas in order to receive some unique dialogue with them a la Obi Wan, Yoda, and Anakin's force ghosts at the end of *Return of the Jedi*.

5. What would be your primary learning goal during your time on the team as an intern?

More than anything else, I want to experience Blizzard's environment and see what the world of full-blown design is like. I'm hoping to learn Blizzard's design values and design principles up close and apply them to my own work. I want to take what Blizzard uses to make their games amazing and use them to make my own games amazing!

6. What do you feel is the most fundamentally important lesson you have learnt about game development so far?

With every action, consider the player first. It does not matter how complex, how elegant, or how deep one's design is if players either don't understand it or don't enjoy it. The absolute first question to ask oneself after designing a mechanic or developing a system is whether it is usable or enjoyable to the players actually interacting with it.

7. Which of Blizzard's core values do you believe is most important to the development of World of Warcraft and why?

Embrace your inner geek! The key piece of the WoW play experience is that of the *player*, and every player wants nothing more than to have the experience they want. Some people want to geek out by feeling like heroes, and WoW caters to them with systems like Transmogrification or Class Halls. Some people want to geek out by optimizing their raiding strategies and progressing to harder content. WoW caters to them through Mythic dungeons and raiding tiers.

In the end, players want to feel a certain way, and the most important thing WoW does is satisfy that desire!